

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A1NEW YORK TIMES
6 December 1986

Israeli Assured the U.S. On Captives, Aides Say

By **BERNARD GWERTZMAN**

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 5 — A high-ranking Israeli official won President Reagan's approval to ship 500 antitank missiles to Iran in 1985 by telling him that Israel believed the action would lead to the freeing of all the Americans then held hostage in Lebanon. American and Israeli sources said today.

The sources — current and former officials from the two Governments — made this point in describing conversations in July and August 1985 between David Kimche, the director of Israel's Foreign Ministry, and Robert C. McFarlane, the White House national security adviser. Both Mr. Kimche and Mr. McFarlane are no longer in office.

The sources said the possibility of all the hostages being freed — seven were then being held — was particularly appealing to Mr. Reagan.

Concern About Buckley

In particular, the American and Israeli sources said, Washington was very concerned about William Buckley, the station chief for the Central Intelligence Agency in Beirut, who had been kidnapped on March 16, 1984.

In fact, it was an intensive effort by the C.I.A. to secure Mr. Buckley's release that alerted Israel to the Reagan Administration's desire to secure the freedom of the hostages. The Israelis said that William J. Casey, the Director of Central Intelligence, had made a special appeal to them to do what they could to win Mr. Buckley's release.

The pro-Iranian group known as Islamic Holy War, which was believed to have custody of all the Americans then held hostage in Lebanon, announced on Oct. 4, 1985, that Mr. Buckley had been "executed."

David P. Jacobsen, who was released on Nov. 2, said recently that he believed Mr. Buckley had actually died in captivity in June 1985, before the Kimche conversations with Mr. McFarlane. But it has not been possible to confirm this. Mr. Buckley's body has never been found, and the United States still holds out the hope he is alive.

Israeli Links to Iran

In seeking Washington's consent to the arms deal with Iran, Israeli sources said, the Israelis were motivated in part by their own desire to restore relations with influential Iranians, and in part by a desire to help the United States secure the release of

hostages. Israel had close ties of its own to Iran before the fall of Shah Mohammed Riza Pahlavi in 1979, and it was concerned that Iraq not be able to defeat Iran in the Persian Gulf war.

Mr. Kimche, in his first discussion with Mr. McFarlane, in July 1985, told him that an Iranian intermediary had arrived in Israel secretly to discuss an improvement in relations. Mr. Kimche also told Mr. McFarlane, according to the American sources, that the Iranian, Manucher Ghorbanifar, said that moderate elements in Iran wanted to reach out to the United States, and that this might lead to the release of the American hostages.

In the second discussion, in August 1985, Mr. Kimche said that he believed that to make any impression on the Iranians and to secure the release of the hostages, arms would have to be sold to Iran. He asked Mr. McFarlane to get American permission for Israel to ship the American-made TOW antitank missiles, and to promise to sell Israel the replacements for them. American sources said that in that conversation, Mr. Kimche told Mr. McFarlane that he believed all the hostages would be freed for 400 to 500 missiles.

The New York Times reported today that Mr. McFarlane is said to have told the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence last Monday that Mr. Reagan gave advance approval to the Israeli shipment and agreed to sell Israel the replacements, even though both Secretary of State George P. Shultz and Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger opposed lifting the arms embargo on Iran.

Statement by Meese

Mr. McFarlane's reported testimony contradicted a statement by Attorney General Edwin Meese 3d, who had said that Mr. Reagan only was informed of the Israeli shipment after the fact, and had not approved it. Today, Larry Speakes, the White House spokesman, said he was unable to find any current White House official who "has a recollection of the President approving a shipment" at that time. But he said that he could not speak with certainty about what Mr. Reagan might have told Mr. McFarlane.

The shipment of antitank missiles took place in September 1985, American officials said.

The White House was alerted in Bei-

rut on Sept. 14 that the Rev. Benjamin F. Weir, who had been a hostage for 16 months, had been released. Based on Israel's belief that all the hostages would be freed, the United States went to extraordinary lengths to keep Mr. Weir's release secret. He was flown by a Navy aircraft to Norfolk, Va., where he was questioned by intelligence experts to find out whether the others would be freed also.

Release Is Announced

Finally, on Wednesday Sept. 18, the White House announced that Mr. Weir freed. A spokesman said then that the White House had believed the release of the other hostages was "imminent" until Tuesday night. No mention was made then of the Iranian or Israeli connection. But it was subsequently learned that Mr. Reagan telephoned Prime Minister Shimon Peres to thank him for his Government's help in securing Mr. Weir's freedom.

The episode was crucial because it set in motion a pattern by which the United States began to use arms to secure the release of hostages, first through the Israelis, and then more directly, American officials said. Every time the United States approved, or sent a shipment of arms to Iran, it was with the expectation that all the remaining hostages would be freed. But each time, either one hostage or none was freed.

Mr. McFarlane is said to have testified to the committee that when he went on a secret mission to Teheran on May 28, 1986, he had been told by Vice Adm. John M. Poindexter, then the national security adviser, that the remaining hostages would be freed. But in fact, none was.

But one hostage, the Rev. Lawrence M. Jenco, was freed in July after another arms shipment. Mr. Jacobsen was released on Nov. 2. Peter Kilburn was killed after the American bombing of Libya in April. He is believed to have been sold to a Libyan group, which carried out the killing.

Hostages Still Held

This leaves two hostages believed to be held by the Islamic Holy War group, Terry A. Anderson, chief Middle East correspondent for The Associated Press, and Thomas M. Sutherland, Dean of Agriculture at the American University of Beirut. Three other Americans are believed to be held by another pro-Iranian group in Lebanon.

It was learned today that a current White House official, Howard R. Teicher, a Middle East specialist on the National Security Council staff, accompanied Mr. McFarlane's mission to Teheran.

It had been previously reported that those on the plane, besides Mr. McFarlane, were Lieut. Col. Oliver L. North, who was dismissed last week from the National Security Council staff for his reported role in diverting payments by Iran for arms to the Nicaraguan

Continued

rebels; George W. Cave, a retired C.I.A. expert on Iran; two C.I.A. communications experts; and Amiran Nir, an Israeli antiterrorism official who handled liaison with the United States on the Iran operation.

Mr. Teicher has not commented on his role in the operation.

Mr. Shultz and Mr. McFarlane are scheduled to testify in open session on Monday before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and more details are expected to emerge then. Admiral Poindexter is scheduled to testify on Tuesday and Mr. Casey on Wednesday.

The committee had said it would require all witnesses to take an oath before testifying, but today it said that Mr. Shultz would not be asked to do so. Mr. Shultz had let the committee know, one aide said, that he felt that taking the oath would be a denigration of his office. Representative Dante B. Fascell, Democrat of Florida, the committee chairman, agreed not to make an issue of this.